



What's their Beef?

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

When it comes to cattle, Texans are a proud and possessive lot. I still remember reading about a public notice, first published in the *Tescosa Pioneer* in 1886: “Any person caught monkeying with my cattle without permission will catch Hell. Yours in Christ, Grizzley Calleen.”

Many years later, Texas cattlemen are again being “monkeyed with” by a recurrent and unfair Japanese ban on U.S. beef exports. Any way you slice it, the beef ban is hurting Texas, its ranchers and families.

Texas accounts for about 15 percent of the total number of cattle and calves in America. Texas’s leading agricultural export is live animals and meat. And prior to the ban, Japan was the largest recipient of U.S. beef.

The Japanese first imposed a ban on American beef in December 2003 after the first U.S. case of “bovine spongiform encephalopathy” or “mad cow disease” was detected in Washington state. Our inspection system is working well. Only two other U.S. cases have been identified – both in older cows not destined for the human food chain.

Texas’s congressional delegation has fought this issue through diplomatic channels. I met with the Japanese Ambassador in February 2005 to try to inject some reason into the debate. We’ve contacted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns to express our concerns. Last year, I co-sponsored legislation to put stiff economic sanctions on the Japanese if the beef ban continued.

On Dec. 12, 2005, the Japanese finally lifted the two-year-old ban on U.S. beef exports, but not before the ban resulted in an annual loss to U.S. beef producers of about \$1.7 billion.

Unfortunately, they reinstated it six weeks later after mistakes by meat plant and federal inspection personnel led to an errant shipment of veal to Japan. Several pieces of “bone-in veal” were sent, an inadvertent violation of our two-nation agreement.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) quickly investigated. USDA officials told me — bottom line — the shipment of bone-in veal to Japan posed no risk to human health. The shipment apparently resulted from a misunderstanding about types of veal eligible for shipment to Japan.

As a result, we have instituted additional man-

datory training for our meat inspectors. We’ve made several other safety improvements to ensure our government complies with international trade pacts.

If anyone knows good meat from bad, it’s a Texan. We’d be the first to halt any unsafe shipments. Texas has a long history of protecting the industry that helped put our state on the map.

In the 1850s, Panhandle cattlemen banned South Texas longhorns from passing through on their way to northern markets. The longhorns carried a tick that spread a disease called “Texas fever.” During cattle drives, the ticks would hop off the South Texas longhorns — immune to the disease — and onto other cattle that quickly came down with Texas fever.

The halt on shipments was enforced mostly inside Texas, but it also spread to Missouri for a time as well. It became known as the Winchester Quarantine, named for the weapon the Panhandle cattlemen used to enforce the ban.

The chairman of the veterinary school at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, now known as Texas A&M University, Dr. Mark Francis, developed an immunization for the disease in 1899. And later, a dipping process was developed to rid cattle of the ticks carrying Texas fever.

Clearly, the Winchester Quarantine (enforced with a fine firearm, I would note) was a decision based on sound science. The Japanese ban is not.

Mad cow disease is not a public health risk in this country. No significant basis exists for the Japanese ban. It appears instead to be a protectionist response benefiting the Japanese beef industry.

We’re pushing hard for a rapid Japanese response to the USDA report. If the Japanese continue to refuse to distinguish between sound science and an isolated, human error, then so be it. We will take action again in Congress. That said, I can’t imagine the Japanese government would prefer tough American sanctions to tender Texas beef.

Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is also the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities.